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Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities

Statement submitted by Oasis Open City Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2005/100.

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220 Participants representing Governments, intergovernmental and non governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, academia, business community gathered in Sintra, Portugal, from 25 to 26 January 2005 to attend the Forum Local Agenda 21: Sustainability and Municipalism. After two days of deliberations, participants adopted the Sintra Declaration to contribute to an effective implementation of Local Agenda 21 and sustainable development. On the basis of the consensus reached, participants pledged to implement the Declaration through concerted efforts. Already, 124 municipalities have subscribed their participation to implement the present Declaration complying with UN recommendations, Local Agenda 21 and MDGs.

Sintra Declaration

Preamble

1. It has been recognized the great delay in adopting and implementing Agenda 21 in Portugal.

2. Agenda 21 implementation in Portugal calls for the engagement of the Portuguese society as well as of the authorities in finding, through their creativity, solutions and initiatives.

3. Agenda 21 implementation needs, first and foremost the involvement of municipalities' governments.

4. In the process of elaboration of local Agenda 21 fora and working groups have to represent means of civic participation for deepening knowledge of local issues.

5. Because each municipality represents a single case solutions have to take into account the diversity of circumstances and factors conditioning the local context.

6. The concept of "trust" is decisive in promoting participation which in turn represents the base for building and reinforcing trust.

7. Public issues are a common good, a field of application of democracy and the essence of Agenda 21.

8. The complexity and slowness of Portuguese bureaucracy is the principal difficulty for the creation of new small and médium scale economic activities.

9. The relationships among local authorities are generally competitive and this competitiveness may be exploited for purposeful ends.

10. Agenda 21 has to be turned in an historical opportunity for revitalizing and reinforcing the positioning of municipalities in the national and international context.

11. Reference has to be made "United Nations Department of Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development" premise on Agenda 21 recognizing the functions and specific responsibilities of the nine principal groups representing the civil society:

    a. Women

b. Children and Youth

c. Indigenous People

d. Non-governmental Organizations

e. Local Authorities

f. Workers and Trade Unions

g. Business and Industry

h. Farmers.

Recommendations

1. Establishing a Council for developing an effective National Program for Agenda 21 which can be formed by the forum organizers endowed with appropriate technical and financial resources.

2. Avoiding that Agenda 21 might become a new bureaucratic mechanism but making all efforts for it to become a catalytic factor for developing civil society.

3. Promoting through this new entity links among national and international organizations so as to integrate local learning models with a context of cultural and economic globalization targeting economic and entrepreneurial growth.

4. Taking into consideration, in developing local Agenda 21, the municipalities' territorial identity as an important factor to shape a new type of organization.

5. Making and disseminating an inventory of:

   a. Municipalities which already adopted or have in course of adoption Agenda 21,

   b. NGOs experts in sustainable development and Agenda 21 issues.

   c. Professionals and practitioners specialized in sustainable development and Agenda 21.

   d. Groups supporting Agenda 21 implementation including Forum participants.

   e. International entities capable of supporting Agenda 21 implementation and processes towards sustainability.

6. Implementing Agenda 21 in such a way to keep, preserve traditional and tacit knowledge avoiding the research of innovation for the sake of innovation.

7. Propitiating mechanisms for a timely and adequate information to citizens in order to make local administrators actions transparent and make it possible their participation in the planning and decision making process.

8. Adopting methodologies and approaches for analysing, valorizing, enhancing places and specific resources around which to organize territorial development.

9. Developing a way of thinking and attitudes towards the creation of cross sectoral partnerships able to promote an integrated and multisectoral approach to local development.

10. Preserving history, and cultural heritage both tangible and intangible and all elements which identify local populations and promote social cohesion.

11. Developing new tools, proposals and events for promoting Agenda 21 such as special awards also involving United Nations.

12. Making more aware the educational community about the determinant role it can play in building Agenda 21, through its active participation in defining a "sustainable architecture" also for schools, exploring interactive approaches within the school and its area of influence.

13. Enhancing communication, participation among young people through the use of appropriate media.

14. Structuring and making available educational programs in the areas of Citizenship and Information Society.

15. Developing tools for providing local players information, showcasing, best practices, legislation etc.

16. Recommending either IQA or another pertinent Portuguese organization to be part of an international working group developing a system of indicators for assessing local context and progress towards sustainability.

17. Establishing an observatory as a sub-commission of Council mentioned in point 1) for monitoring indicators.

18. Including association of condominiums in the list of entities to be invited at the fora and events.

19. Suggesting the following initiatives to be taken at municipal level:

    a. To reformulate sectoral policies;

    b. To find ways to incentive participation/transparency in the decision making process.

    c. To endow municipalities with the information technology means and human resources to manage information and data about initiatives, actions, programs related to Agenda 21 implementation.

    d. To provide for a percentage of Governmental budgets on behalf of municipalities which effectively implement Agenda 21.

    e. To include cultural and historical themes so as to create a sense of belonging, identification and participation among citizen.

20. Urging central legislative authorities to rethink the bureaucratic process and promote institutional strengthening among governmental agencies to shorten times of authorization procedures on behalf of new economic activities.

21. Making entrepreneurs associations aware (especially, RSE Social Entrepreneur Responsibility) of the necessity to link their action to territorial development. RSE, in particular could create through networks tools and incentives for upgrading the environment and the information to the citizen/ consumer.

22. Creating in each municipality a Focal Point as a credible entity and a facilitator for Agenda 21. "Focal Point" will have to master techniques for conducting meetings, working and task groups.

23. Turning Sintra Forum in a permanent forum with working groups, seminaries, conferences.

24. Creating a "Virtual Community" with the support of participants who agree the following:

    a. Contribute to structure a web space in the technological platform Oracle owned by Open City International and aimed to support the above recommendations 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 16, and promoting a wide interaction among local players.

    b. Contribute to create an Open City/UNDESA award dedicated to municipalities engaged in the implementation of Agenda 21.

    c. Supporting FOCA Portugal in its proposal to create a Center of Excellency for an industrial re-conversion in the rural region of Vale do Sousa with European partners.

25. Publishing a book dedicated to the forum with all the speeches so that central and local authorities, universities, NGOs, etc. can have access to the themes presented and discussed at the event.

26. Sending these recommendations to the government representatives, political leaders and other civil society institutions.